

Peace on Earth and Goodwill among Men

-The need for New Global thinking

Keynote Address - 2550 Vesak Celebrations at East London Buddhist Cultural Centre

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I am very glad indeed to be with you this afternoon, coming all the way from Sri Lanka, the one time pearl of the Indian ocean. At my age of eighty-five years, I feel proud too of my distinguished global gathering before me. With this keynote address given to me, it is my intention to unlock for you a bit of the wisdom of the east for the enhancement of the wellness of man on earth here, and for a possible transcendence after his termination of this short-term contract on earth. On a day when we are gathered here to celebrate the 2550th Buddha Day, this subject, I would surmise, would be more than appropriate.

I want everyone of you, whether of the east or the west, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, to feel quite at home with my words like possible transcendence and short term contract on earth. While in Newtonian times, an undiscovered law of gravity held everything, including a little garden apple, glued down to earth, today we fire off with considerable ease, satellites which carry with them tons of metal in weight. When I speak of possible transcendence, I mean that man on earth shall not necessarily be tied down to terrestrial life all the while. At least some among them can, if they choose to, can terminate this painful continuance in the realm of mortals, being subject to birth and death again and again. And with my concept of short term contract on earth, I imply that within an unspecified, perilously short period of time, man shall have to leave his post on earth as a

human, at any time, while many a job still remains undone.

The theme of my address to you today is undoubtedly one of global interest, relevant everywhere irrespective of persons and places. Gotama the Buddha or my Śākyaṃuni of India expressed this magnanimous thought of Peace on Earth and Goodwill among Men in one of his admonitions to mankind, more than two and a half millennia ago. It reads as *Sukhino vā khemino hontu sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā* [See Metta Sutta in the Suttanipāta at verse no. 145]. It means 'May all beings live their lives in comfort and enjoy security of life.' This is the attitude my Buddha calls upon humanity to develop towards the rest of life in the universe.

Place-wise, this message of Buddhism was delivered in the Gangetic region of an un-divided India, more than twenty-five centuries ago. Gotama was born as a descendent of a rice-grower's clan. His father Suddhodana [Clean Rice], as well as his uncles Dhotodana [Washed Rice] and Amitodana [Abundant Rice], they all had, as their names indicate, something to do with brands of rice of very high quality. This implies that they worked on their land for its productivity, ploughing their fields and tending their cattle. They had no need whatsoever to be ambitious to wage wars and conquer more territories of others.

There was then abundant sanity in the world. It was such a time and such a place that produced the thinker Siddhartha, the harbinger of peace to the world. As a human, via the new mode of his thinking and the new values he was going to propagate among the humans, he was destined to open a new chapter in the history of mankind. It is for this reason that he came to be called the 'Teacher of Gods and Men' or *satthā devamanussānaṃ*.

Human thinking in the sixth century B.C. was at a peak both in the east and the west. Thinkers in India, the Far East and the western world were well above thinking unduly aloud and unduly long about their daily bread. They were all keen on improving the quality of human life on earth. The Buddhists believed in the

possibility of creating a divine kingdom on earth for man, as is implied in the concept of *Brahma-vihāra* or divine modes of living among men. Sponsored by the Buddhists, this consisted of friendliness, compassion, appreciative joy and equanimity. The Buddha also discovered, by his own endeavor, something transcendently supreme, beyond the realm of the mortal humans.

To begin with, this concept of the divine which people of the world naturally look up to was what was physically above the earth, like *tien* with the Chinese and *dyauh* with the Indians. The sky above was deemed heavenly or divine with its brilliance of light, while the earth below was regarded as the domain of the humans, the mortals who were destined to end their brief lives in death, time and again. Thus what was above the earth like the sun and the moon and the elements around us like thunder and lightening, stormy winds and rain, with consequent large bodies of water moving across the land, exerted power over helpless mortals on earth, threatening them with death and destruction, as it continues to happen even today. And people on earth still believing that these are both acts of punishment and vengeance on the part of the mightier above.

The Indians soon transformed these elemental powers into divinities, with a great deal of corrective ability invested in them. This is how vast pantheons of powerful divinities were created by the Vedic Indians of pre-Buddhist times. In their moral consciousness, these early Indians were far ahead of us. These thinkers made gods in the healthy and robust patterns they conceived.

Much anterior to today's possibility of the disastrous atomic explosives of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the hands of the believed to be more developed man of today, Vedic Indians thought it wiser to harness these natural powers for benevolent purposes. Indra was the ever-triumphant God of the Heavenly Realms, and the violently powerful element of water on earth assumed divine form as Varuṇa. These two together became the guardians of *ṛta* or the moral law in the universe. Hence these twin divinities *Indrā-Varunau* are referred to as *Ṛtasya Gopau* or Moral Guardians of the world.

While these heavenly powers were within the sight of humans over whom they assumed control, humans too, would have naturally felt that the jurisdiction of these divine powers over them was by no means to be conceived as remote control. These powers were near enough to physically handle the miscreants. They even assumed that Varuṇa as the God of Waters or *Apāṃ-patiḥ* filled their bellies with water as a punishment for sins committed by them, resulting in a disease called dropsy. Yet another, Parjanya, the God of Thunder, was believed to strike dead the evil-doers of the world with his thunder bolt: *Parjanyaḥ stanayan hanti duṣkṛtaḥ*.

In these early days of pre-naval conquests, neither of Armadas nor Viking ships, and of unknown Americas, the world was a smaller and happier place. Apples of the Forbidden Tree did not tempt man. The Chinese of about the sixth century B.C., of the time of the philosopher Confucius, spoke of the world as being within the Four Seas [tsu hai]. All within the four seas, they said, were brothers: Tsu hai ca nei kai tsung ti ye. What a delightful concept of Brotherhood of Mankind, with no overtones or undertones of ethno-religious identities or hostilities. It was possible and it was also necessary to think of moral order as a totality within this small territory. This certainly was and had to be all-embracing and by no means divisive or exclusive.

Century after century followed. New lands were discovered, and geo-physical extensions, even in the area of religious thinking, began to show themselves up. Identification of territorial as well as of religious groups was becoming a menacing reality as the order of the day. Old Adam, possibly in other new guises, was showing himself up once again. Any body different to oneself, different in ethnicity and skin color, in religious beliefs and forms of worship, rapidly began to be identified as a being in one's enemy's camp and had therefore necessarily to be destroyed and eliminated.

But in the world today, at least a few among others, we are glad to note, are learning bitter lessons from history, history which is man made here and not

produced in heaven above. Dis-fame and dishonor, together with irreparable damage resulting to all parties concerned, from wars thoughtlessly initiated by arrogant and deluded leadership in the world, should be clear and precise enough to indicate to the humans down here on earth not to run to the battle field, obeying unidentified commands from elsewhere. This is a lesson all nations, big or small, need to seriously learn today. It is more than lamentable that many nations of the world, with varying degrees of military potential, are being constantly lassoed to fight against their one time allies and friends.

It is becoming evident, day after day, that there could never be such commands for massacres and annihilations from what we would deem as heavens above. Heavens have always to be divinely good. Make no mistake. More often than not, it is masked human villainy, communicated perennially from man to man, nation to nation, which parade the streets down here as divine commands. Under mistaken submission to such diabolic commands of unknown human genesis, staggering crimes are committed by man against man, nations against nations, laying dead and wounded countless men, women and children in every part of the world, whether it be Sri Lanka, Malaysia or Black Africa, or even Europe and America.

Let me conclude my address to you in the midst of this august assembly with a reference to the Buddhist legend of the Universal Monarch or *Rājā cakravatti*. He is the idealized model ruler of the world. Without shedding even a drop of blood, and conquering the whole world with no use of weapons whatsoever [*adaṇḍena asatthena abhivijaya*], he decentralizes world government in the hands of regional governors who willingly surrender to him the lands they have hitherto ruled.

All that is primarily required for good governance is moral goodness everywhere. Human rights, much more than is even dreamt of today, comprehensively listed under the Buddhist *pañca-sīla*, are to be respected and maintained, undeniably under legal enforcement by the rulers. This enforcement

is legally vested in the hands of those who govern. Do not miss this point, we pray, in Buddhist teachings, both by Buddhists and non-Buddhists. Maintenance of law and order in this manner is part and parcel of the function of the state. That comprises good governance. Note the emphasis and the compulsion under which it is put into the state via the hands of the rulers.

In the land under your command, says the Universal Monarch, no life shall be destroyed [*pāṇo na hantabbo*], no man shall be dispossessed of his legitimately acquired possessions [*adinnaṃ na ādāttabbaṃ*], gender proprieties shall be observed and maintained, without violence and vulgarity [*kāmesu micchā na caritabbā*] honesty in all transactions shall be respected [*musā na bhaṇitabbā*] and finally, sanity of judgement be carefully guarded and preserved by keeping away from drugs and alcohol [*suram na pātabbam*]. Thus we witness on the one hand, the State enforces the establishment of moral goodness in the land, with evident legal enforcement. On the other, social orderliness in the land canvasses the willing submission of the people for successful governance.

Two and a half millennia ago, the saner world considered this to be a very sound and purposeful foundation for what could be deemed a benevolent globalization. Within this ethically adhered to moral foundation any political ideology could hopefully flourish. So the Universal monarch would endorse the prevalence of diversity of patterns of statecraft among his rulers [*yathā-bhuttañca bhuñjatha*]. This is philanthropy at its best. We do not need to talk any more. Thank you.

May there be peace on earth and goodwill among men.